

NSC BRIEFING

21 November 1957

LAOS

- I. After nearly three years of tortuous negotiations, a coalition government was formed in Laos on 19 November including two Pathet Lao representatives. The legalization of Pathet political activity opens all Laos to widespread subversion.
- A. Final agreement came rapidly during October when the Pathets, at the insistence of the Viet Minh, showed new flexibility and Laotian conservatives, ^{including} gave in as a result of Interior Minister Katay, ^{ceased to oppose settlement} ~~about face on the issue~~. (Katay had paralyzing stroke last week and is not now effective force.)
- II. The settlement provides that:
- A. Pathet Lao (PL) will operate as a legal political party and receive guarantees of civil rights.
- B. 1,500 PL troops will be integrated into the 22,000-man Laotian army and certain functionaries into the civil service.
- C. Government committed to policy of neutrality, to accept aid offered without strings from any source, and to open relations with all nations.
- III. In return, administration of the two northern provinces is to be returned to government control; Pathets are to surrender arms and disband armed forces.
- IV. Dangers inherent in settlement are considerable.
- A. Questionable that Souvanna will allow government to move against Communist-disciplined "hard core" of PL aggressively enough to seize command of situation during implementation of accords.

NSA review completed

- B. Pathets will doubtless ^{attempt to} undermine stability by integrating their most effective cadres into army and civil service.
- C. In any event Pathets will break out of remote northern provinces and step-up operations throughout country.
- D. [redacted] covert Laotian Communist Party will direct the legalized PL front organization.

1. Pathets estimate that out of a total population of about 2,000,000 some 170,000 people in an area covering three-fifths of Laos have been organized into their front group.
- V. Supplementary elections to be held in March to expand the National Assembly from 39 to 59 seats will be of critical importance; Pathets can be expected to try for good showing.
- VI. Settlement will have unfavorable psychological, political and strategic consequences throughout Southeast Asia.
- A. Most directly affected will be Thailand and South Vietnam-- where settlement will increase internal pressures for adoption of neutrality policies.
1. Close cultural and ethnic ties along border area, and economically depressed character of Northeast plateau of Thailand provide fertile ground for Communist propaganda.
- B. South Vietnam will be more isolated politically on the Indochinese peninsula and successful settlement in Laos may also make it more difficult for Burma and Malaya to continue insistence on unconditional surrender of Communist insurgents.

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